

30th District 1998 Session Update

Rep. Maryann Mitchell

Rep. Tim Hickel

Protecting Taxpayers — Re-shaping Government

Dear Friends,

During the past three years, the Legislature has made great strides in achieving the goals of protecting taxpayers, making government more accountable to you and delivering services more efficiently and effectively.

Growth in state spending is at its lowest level in 25 years and has been held well below the limit established by Initiative 601. The massive tax increases passed in 1993 have all been repealed and permanent limits have also been placed on state and local property taxes. Historic reforms have added accountability and personal responsibility to state agencies and programs, including the welfare and juvenile justice systems.

As the mid-point of the 1998 legislative session approaches, we wanted to update you on many of the issues that are at the forefront of the Legislature's agenda this year. As the session progresses, we encourage you to contact our offices with your thoughts, ideas and opinions on these issues or other topics. Hearing from you helps us represent you more effectively.

Sincerely,

Maryann Mitchell

Rep. Maryann Mitchell

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We want to hear from you! Attend one of our town hall meetings...

Northeast Tacoma

Saturday, Feb. 21

9 a.m. - 10 a.m.

Marine View Presbyterian Church
8469 East Side Dr. NE

Federal Way

Saturday, Feb. 21

10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Federal Way City Hall
33530 - 1st Way South

Algona

Saturday, Feb. 21

12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Algona City Hall
402 Warde

Keeping focused on controlling spending, cutting taxes

Since our election in the fall of 1994, the Legislature has been successful in adopting budgets and enacting reforms that address our primary objective — protecting taxpayers.

These major accomplishments include budgets that have limited state spending and controlled the growth of government, tax cuts that have allowed Washingtonians to keep more of their own money, and changes in state rules and regulations that have made government operate more efficiently and effectively.

This responsible fiscal policy has helped grow a budget surplus of more than \$850 million this year, much of which we support saving in a “rainy day” reserve account to be used in case of future economic downturns.

This session, we are also continuing to pursue measures that further our progress in making government more accountable to taxpayers, including holding the line on state spending and steadfastly opposing any attempts to undo or weaken the I-601 spending limit.

In addition to spending controls, Washington taxpayers have also benefitted from more than \$1 billion in tax cuts over the past three years. When compared to personal income, state taxes are now at their lowest level in more than a decade. This session, we are continuing to fight to reduce onerous tax regulations and pursue further permanent tax relief, specifically a reduction in the “car tab tax” and further property tax reforms.

A record to remember

We don't pass bills and forget about them. Results count, and after we set policy, we make sure it translates to results. Part of our job this year is to implement the major policy reforms we passed in 1997. Thanks to Republican leadership, we have a strong record to build on for 1998. Here's what we'll be monitoring this year:

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW POLICY



What to watch

Juvenile justice reform

- Tougher sentencing standards
- Sentencing alternatives, including boot camps
- Mandatory parental involvement in juvenile court cases
- Juvenile justice grants for local communities

Welfare reform

- Time limits on benefits (five years over one's lifetime)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service



- Child-care assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits

Budget

- Holding the line on spending
- Protecting I-601 limits

Property taxes

- Temporary 4.7 percent cut in state rate becomes permanent in 1998 (Referendum 47)
- Local governments must vote publicly before raising property taxes above inflation rate

Improving learning by emphasizing reading

The push for higher academic standards in our schools continues in the Legislature this year. Our first priority is reading. Recent test results show that more than half of the fourth-grade students in Washington do not meet the standards of reading ability for their age.

We cannot afford to let students move from grade to grade without such a basic skill. Two important education bills introduced this session target the problem. HB 2418 would give teachers the tools they need to provide basic reading instruction in the early grades. HB 2419 would strengthen and improve schools that have

historically fallen below the standards of reading performance.

To give schools more opportunities to get kids started on the right track, Rep. Hickel is sponsoring HB 2329, which would allow school districts to offer full-day kindergarten beginning in the 1998-99 school year.

Full-day kindergarten provides greater learning opportunities for students while addressing the concerns of working parents. For two-parent working families and single-parent households, all-day kindergarten makes practical and academic sense.

Funding transportation improvements without a gas tax increase

We are strongly committed to finding responsible and effective solutions to the traffic congestion problems we face in the Puget Sound region.

As our population grows, so will the strains on our transportation system. Further, our economy depends on an efficient road system, so that goods and people can be moved in a timely manner. Without a solid infrastructure, our economic competitiveness will be greatly compromised.

However, while the governor has called for a gas tax increase of up to 11 cents-per-gallon over the next five years to pay for road improvements, Republicans in the Legislature have proposed a plan that funds the same improvements with existing revenue, not by increasing the gas tax.

These are the components of the Republican proposal:

1. Make better use of MVET money.

Right now, only 16 percent of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET), the tax you pay when licensing your car each year, goes to the state's transportation fund. Twenty-four percent is deposited into the general fund. We propose transferring more MVET revenue from the general fund to the transportation budget to fully fund \$2.4 billion in new transportation projects over six years.

2. Use the existing budget surplus.

A portion of the state's \$850 million budget surplus would be used to fill the hole left in the general fund from the MVET transfer, protecting other priorities like education. However, a healthy \$500 million reserve, to protect against future economic downturns, would remain.

3. Improve efficiency at the Department of Transportation.

The results of an audit of the state transportation agencies will be out soon, and will report ways to improve efficiency and save money. Those savings would be used to help fund the transportation package.

4. Cut the "car tab tax."

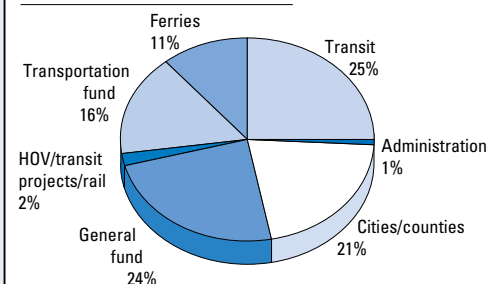
The annual tax automobile owners pay to license their cars would be reduced by about \$45 per vehicle. The governor's proposed cut was just \$35.

Because our funding package requires a transfer between budgets, it would require approval by the voters in November 1998 to re-affirm and strengthen Initiative 601.

In short, both plans provide the same amount of money for transportation projects. Both reduce the motor vehicle excise tax. And both protect programs supported by the general fund, including education. The only difference is that the Republican plan accomplishes these objectives without a tax increase.

MVET Distributions

Total 1997-99: \$1.59 billion



Taking drunk drivers off our roads

In 1996, 331 people died at the hands of drunk drivers in Washington state — 79 more than were murdered. An additional 10,284 people were injured in accidents where someone had been drinking.

These statistics prompt Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) to call drunken driving “the nation’s most frequently committed violent crime.” Few crimes have such a consistent, tragic impact on families. Unfortunately, current penalties for driving under the influence are far too lenient. In 1998 the Legislature will send a clear, strong message to people who insist on risking the lives of others by drinking and driving — if you drink and drive, you’re going to pay for it.

We cannot repair the tragedies caused by habitual drunken drivers, but we can do more to prevent them from getting behind the wheel of a car. We expect to see several proposals this year that would expand the penalties for DUI offenses. Here are some of the ideas the Legislature will discuss:

- Require certain people convicted of drunk driving to operate only vehicles equipped with ignition interlock devices
- Authorize impoundment and forfeiture of vehicles operated by individuals with a suspended or revoked driver’s license

- Authorize impoundment of vehicles whenever a driver violates DUI laws
- Increase fines and jail times nearly threefold for people convicted of DUI, and add extra penalties for repeat offenders
- Require a motorist’s driver’s license to be administratively suspended for 90 days without exception for a first DUI conviction



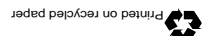
In 1996, 331 people died on state roads in accidents that involved alcohol.

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Washington State Legislature
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